

United States Environmental Protection Agency
Position Statement on
Environmental Management Systems (EMSs)

Background

In recent years organizations have increasingly adopted formal Environmental Management Systems (EMSs). The most common framework for an EMS is plan-do-check-act, with the goal of continual improvement. EMSs provide organizations of all types with a structured approach for managing environmental and regulatory responsibilities to improve overall environmental performance, including areas not subject to regulation such as resource conservation and energy efficiency. EMSs can also help organizations better integrate the full scope of environmental considerations and get better results, by establishing a continuous process of checking to make sure environmental goals are met. EMS implementation ensures that procedures are in place for taking remedial action if problems occur. From a business perspective, they can often help make organizations more efficient and more competitive and help address other important issues such as security at key facilities. EMSs do not replace the need for regulatory and enforcement programs, but they can complement them. EMSs can indicate opportunities for EPA to streamline regulations, and be considered in compliance assistance, monitoring, and enforcement.

First adopted by manufacturing industries, EMSs are now being used throughout the private sector and, increasingly, by public agencies of many different types.

For the past several years, EPA has been involved in a wide range of activities designed to facilitate EMS adoption, including those based on ISO 14001 and other models, and cooperative efforts with Canada and Mexico through the Commission on Environmental Cooperation. We are also leading research designed to evaluate effectiveness of EMSs in various settings, and integrating EMSs into more of our own programs, including enforcement settlement agreements.

In 1999, EPA issued a major report entitled *Aiming for Excellence: Actions to Encourage Stewardship and Accelerate Environmental Progress*, which committed that EPA "... will encourage organizations to use EMSs that improve compliance, pollution prevention, and other measures of environmental performance. We'll continue evaluation efforts to learn more about which EMS elements and applications are most effective, and we'll determine how these systems might be used to strengthen environmental programs and policies."

Most recently, EPA has developed an Environmental Management Policy for its own facilities to meet the goals set forth in Executive Order 13148—*The Greening of Government Through Leadership in Environmental Management*.

Based on the practical experience and knowledge we have gained, it is becoming clear that EMSs, when implemented diligently, can help improve environmental performance and foster other important benefits to organizations. Therefore, EPA is today issuing an updated statement on EMSs along with an EMS Plan to guide Agency activities over the next several years.

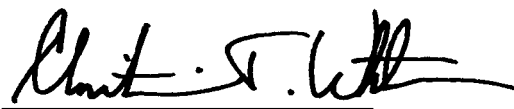
Statement of Principles

EPA's overall policy on Environmental Management Systems, like the EMS approach itself, will be guided by the principles of continual improvement and learning, flexibility, and collaboration.

- EPA will encourage wide spread use of EMSs across a range of organizations and settings, with particular emphasis on adoption of EMSs to achieve improved environmental performance and compliance, pollution prevention through source reduction, and continual improvement. We will support EMSs that are appropriate to the needs and characteristics of specific sectors and facilities.
- EPA will encourage organizations that use EMSs to obtain stakeholder input on matters relevant to the development and implementation of an EMS, and demonstrate accountability for the performance outcomes of their EMSs through measurable objectives and targets. Additionally, we will encourage organizations to share information on the performance of their EMSs with the public and government agencies, and facilitate this process where practicable.
- EPA will encourage the use of recognized environmental management frameworks, such as the ISO 14001 standard, as a basis for designing and implementing EMSs that aim to achieve outcomes aligned with the Nation's environmental policy goals and the principles of this Position Statement.
- EPA will work collaboratively with other key partners—including states, tribes, localities, industry, and non-governmental organizations—as we implement this policy. EPA will support international EMS initiatives that will assist in increasing the use of EMSs in the United States. We will ensure that our decisions and our work as we implement this policy are transparent to all interested parties.
- EPA will lead by example, by implementing EMSs at appropriate EPA facilities.
- EPA will foster continual learning by supporting research and public dialogue on EMSs that help improve our understanding of circumstances where EMSs can advance the Nation's environmental policy goals. We will strive to collect better information on the application of EMSs, including how well EMSs meet environmental performance expectations; and the costs and benefits to organizations and the environment.

5/15/02

DATE



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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency